Religious Pluralism in Poland: *contradictio in adiecto*? Internal Diversity in the Roman Catholic Church

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The Roman Catholic Church undoubtedly plays a significant role in Poland, both in the public sphere and in the individual lives of many citizens. However, in order to understand the internal dynamics of the Church in Poland, it is important to stress that it is not a homogenous institution. On the contrary, there is much space for internal pluralism. My project was designed to investigate how people of different—and sometimes opposite—world views, values, goals and religious practices can all come together within a single dominant Church.

I conducted fieldwork in 2008–09 in the city of Kraków, both in its centre and in the district of Nowa Huta. Kraków is considered to be a very Catholic and conservative city and both the influential Catholic weekly *Tygodnik Powszechny* and the well-known Catholic publishing house *Znak* are located here. Karol Wojtyła was the Archbishop of Kraków before he was called to the Holy See. Several churches in the city centre have active lay groups, including student groups, but the congregations which are best known and considered to be the most open are not related to parish churches, but to the Dominican and Jesuit orders. I worked most closely with socially active students at the Dominican church. My other field site was Nowa Huta, built after World War Two as an exemplary Communist city, a city for workers of the new Lenin Steelworks and a settlement intended to remain devoid of religion. Most of the workers were migrants from rural areas and the inhabitants today look proudly back to their struggles to build churches, their fundamental act of resistance towards socialist power holders. Here I carried out research in a parish, concentrating on its charity group, its library and the "circle of friends of Radio Maryja". I also conducted interviews throughout the city with NGO activists connected to the Roman Catholic Church.

Although the groups I studied belonged to the same religious community, their beliefs, understandings and practices of Catholicism differed significantly (cf. Mahieu, East-Central Europe cluster). I found that liberal Catholic elites, including journalists who shaped the mainstream discourse, looked at some of these differences normatively. This reinforced divisions and led to Manichean distinctions between 'good' and 'bad' Catholicism. Good Catholi-

cism was liberal and always open for dialogue. It was based not only on faith, but also on knowledge. Among the clergy, although a few bishops were considered to be liberal, this strand of Catholicism was mainly associated with the Jesuits and Dominicans. They have created centres for debates which have attracted large numbers of students and intellectuals.

Enacting a nativity play in a parishioner's home, Kraków, January 2009.

Bad Catholicism, according to this elite perspective, had at least two variants: the harmless and the harmful. The benign form of bad Catholicism was folk or popular religion, as epitomized in the cult of the Virgin Mary. People in this category might have a deep faith, but they lacked basic knowledge of the teachings of their religion. This element of popular religion was generally treated with concern, shame and embarrassment rather than with contempt. However, lack of education and ignorance about Catholic doctrine could render these people susceptible to the 'ugly' influences of harmful Catholicism. This variant of the Roman Catholic Church in Poland was disparaged as integrist, nationalistic, xenophobic and obscurantist. It was always on the lookout for external enemies, who could be blamed for any signs of evil within the Church (cf. Komáromi, Russia Cluster). Although a few bishops were associated with this viewpoint, it was held to reach its apogee in the community around Radio Maryja. The groups that I researched in the parish of Nowa

Huta belonged to the Catholicism that was looked down upon by elites. Some were considered benign (the pious members of various parish groups) and some were perceived as harmful, notably the circle of friends of Radio Maryja. My intention was not to reinforce this dualistic view of Catholicism, but to probe emic understandings of it, especially as it became apparent during my research that this division was a general point of reference: for the Catholics in Nowa Huta, liberals such as those in the city centre functioned as the 'significant other'.

Like other members of the team I borrowed theoretical concepts from Antonio Gramsci and Pierre Bourdieu. For my purposes, Bourdieu's analysis of how taste serves to maintain and reproduce power relations in society was particularly relevant (Sekerdej in preparation a). I came to understand that normative divisions within the Catholic Church were based not only on different beliefs and practices, but also to a large extent on aesthetic forms, which feed back into distinctions based on social and cultural capital.

The concept of civil society has been a further theoretical concern of this project. Like Pasieka (above), I examined the place of voluntary parish groups in civil society in Poland. I questioned whether and to what extent the model of civil society (itself a normative category in the Polish context) is appropriate for analyzing these communities (Sekerdej in preparation b; Pasieka and Sekerdej 2009). My research showed that gender has remained a key organizing principle of the institutional church and its parish-based groups and Catholic associations, among liberals and conservatives alike. I also inquired into the ways people deal with hierarchy. The hierarchical structure of the Church was visible everywhere in religious symbolism and emphasized in religious teachings, yet I found that it could in practice be substantially modified and surprising degrees of agency could be exerted at lower levels of the hierarchy. This was made possible through divisions of labour within the local religious community, which allowed the various circles and groups around the church to be semi-autonomous. When I enquired into what attracted individuals to different Church-based lay communities, it became apparent that these groups had multiple meanings and functions for their members. They often formed support groups for those who were living far from their relatives, were struggling to cope with bereavement or were simply in need of counsel and a temporary refuge. The experience of serious illness was often a key factor leading lay people to affiliate to such group. The religious mass media (notably the controversial Radio Maryja) offered a sense of close family relations that transcended the parish and the immediate neighbourhood and created a nationwide virtual community.

In sum, the binary normative division obscures a much bigger diversity within the Roman Catholic Church in Poland, while at the same time it helps to reinforce power relations in society.